

IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group: Otters in Captivity Task Force (OCT)
– Supporting quality captive otter care worldwide –

OCT Mission Statement:

The IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group Otters in Captivity Task Force (OSG OCT) promotes worldwide communication between individuals working with otters in captivity and all other settings.

For captive biologists:

All institutions holding otters should support in-situ and ex-situ conservation efforts for these charismatic species. Providing financial and or technical support for these efforts is crucial as is the proper captive care of these species. To this end OCT is promoting the following suggestions:

Support *ex-situ* and *ex-situ in-country* conservation efforts.

- **Create a partnership** with a range-country zoos/aquariums housing the otter species you exhibit.
- All captive facilities should work together to further improved care and breeding success in the world's captive otter populations.
- Zoos and aquariums should support all on-going efforts by national, regional, and international zoo/aquarium organizations to create 'best practices' otter care guidelines by sharing their expertise with these organizations **and adopting the standards set out in these guidelines**. Many of these are available on the OCT website, <http://www.otterspecialistgroup.org/Library.html>
- **All zoos and aquariums should abide by breeding recommendations** from regional/national/international zoo and aquarium organizations. This is particularly true for commonly held species whose populations require sound genetic management or whose populations may need to be lowered making room for species less well represented.
- All zoos and aquariums should abide by breeding recommendations from regional/national/international zoo and aquarium organizations for small population otters species. Inter-zoo/aquarium cooperation in genetic management of these species is supported by the OCT and deemed to be of great importance.
- Particular attention should be paid to assisting in-country institutions holding otter species 'of concern' in vet and husbandry matters, keeper training, etc. **This is particularly true for species currently receiving little attention from zoos and aquaria such as the hairy-nosed and smooth-coated otters of Asia.**
- Donate funding for conservation, research, education, and/or outreach programs in return for receiving animals on loan from range countries.
- Create a foundation or fund that will allow your visitors and donors to contribute to in-situ or ex-situ research and captive care in otter range countries.

- Form Conservation, Research, Education, and Outreach Departments within a range country zoo by contributing funds or technical expertise.
- Provide expertise, and logistical/technical support to assist on-going research projects.
- Provide expertise, logistical/technical support to help improve the husbandry and management of otters in range country zoos.
- Provide expertise to facilitate translation of husbandry materials into range country languages.
- Donate tools, instruments, building materials, educational materials etc. to range country zoos.
- Host and attend conferences to build relationships with range country professionals.

Support *in-situ* (field-based) conservation efforts.

- The OSG website, many national/regional zoo/aquarium organizations, and other conservation organizations offer lists of on-going research projects focused on otters. Zoos and aquariums can support these efforts by donating funds, materials, and/or technical support.
- Include information on field research and conservation efforts being conducted on the species you exhibit in your graphics. Provide a method for visitors to contribute to these efforts and a way to find out more about these efforts.
- Where appropriate and possible contribute information and/or samples for these research efforts.

Support world-wide efforts to secure and maintain viable otter populations

- Stimulate and maintain worldwide communications and networking between institutions holding otters, researchers, educators, and conservationists.
- Provide the OSG OCT with contact information for all organizations and individuals working on otter conservation, research, and captive care issues. This information will be made available on the OSG website.
- Provide the OSG OCT with publication information on work done on all aspects of otter biology, behavior, health issues, conservation, research, education strategies etc. for addition to our web-based reference sources.
- Publish information learned from research, observations, and experiences at individual institutions to contribute to overall knowledge that can benefit all.
- Add creative otter pages to your institution's website. Link your website to the OSG and national zoo organization's web pages.
- All facilities housing otter species should endeavor to collect, record, and share all information gathered from zoo animals via observations, medical procedures, and captive-based studies, so it can be used by researchers, field conservationists, and other zoos as a reference source for wild and/or captive populations. This will contribute to conservation/management strategies for these species in the wild and also increase overall knowledge about these animals.

- Carry out and participate in research conducted within zoo facilities and contribute to external research projects that aid *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation.
- Contribute fecal, tissue, and/or blood samples for hormonal or genetic studies.
- Work closely together with conservation groups/NGO's and government/law enforcement, e.g. IUCN Otter Specialist Group, CITES, IBAMA etc. to promote awareness.
- Create and distribute informative and attractive educational materials in multiple languages.

Conclusion:

Cooperation between all zoos world-wide to create healthy self-sustaining captive otter populations is essential to supporting conservation efforts of these increasingly threatened species. At this time, many captive otter populations are not self-sustaining requiring intensified efforts to manage these species cooperatively while offering the highest quality of care. The OSG OCT supports continued cooperation between all zoos with their active participation in studbooks and the sharing of best captive management practices through the creation of husbandry guidelines such as the International Giant Otter Studbook Husbandry and Management Information and Guidelines (Sykes-Gatz 2005), North American River Otter Husbandry Notebook, 3rd revision (Reed-Smith 2008), and AZA Otter Animal Care Guidelines (AZA 2008). Guidelines set out in these best practice guidelines should be adopted by all facilities. The OSG OCT encourages increased support of *in-situ* otter research and conservation efforts by the world's zoos and aquariums as well as increased support of in-country captive facilities efforts to improve their captive care of all otter species.

For field biologists

The OCT encourages all *in-situ* researchers to become involved in some capacity with the zoos/aquariums working with otters in their range countries. This can take many forms including offering technical advice regarding behaviour or habitat requirements, offering to do informative talks for employees or zoo/aquarium members, or providing informative materials for use in fund raising.